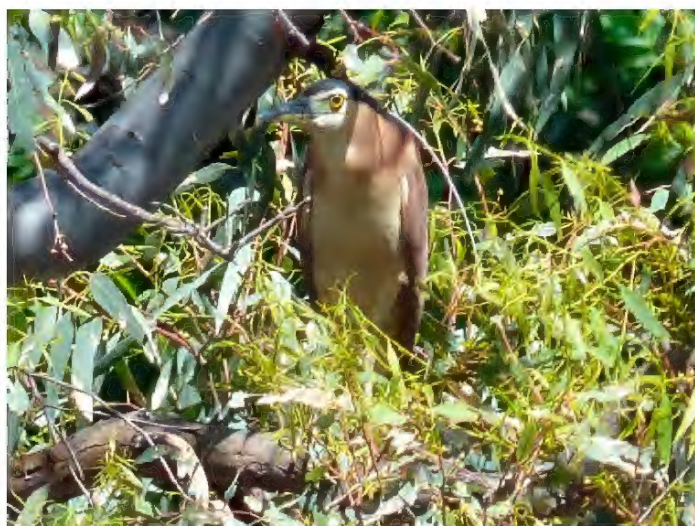


Castlemaine Naturalist

December 2014

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Night Heron, Castlemaine Botanical Gardens
November photo by Noel Young

A Pudding Bag of Nature Lessons

What a treat it is to visit a rich nature reserve with a nature enthusiast! Our November excursion to Pudding Bag Nature Reserve with John Walter was a just such an experience.

I learned:

- * To decipher **Slender Rice-flower** (*Pimelea linifolia*) from **Common Rice-flower** (*Pimelea humilis*) by looking at the stem below the flowering head - if it is hairy then it's humilis!
- * That **Button Everlastings** have had a name change and are now **Coronidium scorpioides**
- * That **Fryerstown Grevillea** (*Grevillea obtecta*) occurs in the Castlemaine area and has very variable leaf forms and shorter flower styles. **Creeping Grevillea** (*Grevillea repens*) is more likely to be seen in the Daylesford area and it has longer styles on a different angle.
- * That you can identify a **Yam Daisy** (*Microseris* sp 3) by its unique seed head.
- * That you can run your hands up but not easily down along the saw-like edges of a **Thatch Saw-sedge** (*Gahnia radula*); and that you should resist running your hands along the flattened oval leaf of a **Variable Sword-sedge** (*Lepidosperma laterale*) or you will probably cut your hands on the sharp sword-like edges.
- * The upright leaves and the parallel veins on the underside of the leaf help identify **Prickly Broom Heath** (*Monotoca scoparia*) when not in flower and that you have to look very closely to see the tiny round green seed pods developing at this time of the year.
- * To look for the differences between the **Grey Parrot-pea** (*Dillwynia cinerascens*) with slightly recurved tips on the crowded narrow leaves on erect spreading branches with flowers in loose terminal clusters; the **Showy Parrot-pea** (*Dillwynia sericea*) with stiff hairy branches, and stiff, warty, often hairy leaves with flowers crowded singly and in pairs in leaf-axils towards the ends of the branches; and the **Bushy Parrot-pea** (*Dillwynia ramosissima*) with its glabrous

(non hairy), mostly spine tipped branches crowded with shorter, dark, almost cylindrical leaves with solitary flowers on the lateral branches or in the upper axils.

- * That the seedpod of **Pink Bells** (*Tetratheca ciliata*) mimics the leaf shape and is often overlooked.
- * That the moss **Dicranoloma billarderi** looks a bit like green shaggy carpet with the pile bent over; and another moss **Breutelia affinis** has male flowers that look like stars and female flowers that look like little green apples.
- * That **White Punk fungus** is composed of fibrous compacted mycelium and Aborigines used it as a dense smouldering mass to carry fire or shredded this mass and used it to start a fire.

- Geraldine Harris



John Walter leading the group



Gahnia radula Thatch Saw-sedge



Grevillea obtecta Fryerstown Grevillea



Monotoca scoparia Prickly Broom-heath



Dicranoloma billarderi



Dillwynia sericea Showy Parrot-pea



Dillwynia cinerascens Grey Parrot-pea



Dillwynia ramosissima Bushy Parrot-pea



Tetratheca ciliata seed pods mimicking the leaf.



White Punk Fungus

By Rita Mills

<i>Acacia paradoxa</i>	Hedge Wattle
<i>Arthropodium strictum</i>	Chocolate Lily. <i>There was speculation that some of the plants were A. fimbriatum, Nodding Chocolate Lily, which was not on the list. It tends to start flowering when A. strictum is coming to the end of its season.</i>
<i>Brachyloma daphnoides</i>	Daphne Heath
<i>Brunonia australis</i>	Blue Pincushions – <i>one of Major Mitchell's favourite herbs. He had the idea it would make an ideal garden plant, not knowing the difficulty in propagating them.</i>
<i>Burchardia umbellata</i>	Milkmaids
<i>Calochilus robertsonii</i>	Purplish Beard-orchid
<i>Cassinia aculeata</i>	Common Cassinia or Dogwood - <i>a very nice specimen in flower on the road just out of the reserve</i>
<i>Comesperma ericinum</i>	Heath Milkwort
<i>Coronidium scorpioides</i>	Button Everlasting
<i>Dianella admixta</i>	Black-anther Flax-lily
<i>Dillwynia cinerascens</i>	Grey Parrot-pea
<i>Dillwynia ramosissima</i>	Bushy Parrot-pea
<i>Dillwynia sericea</i>	Showy Parrot-pea
<i>Drosera peltata ssp auriculata</i>	Tall Sundew
<i>Eucalyptus goniocalyx</i>	Long-leaf Box
<i>Eucalyptus macrorhyncha</i>	Red Stringybark
<i>Eucalyptus obliqua</i>	Messmate Stringybark
<i>Gahnia radula</i>	Thatch Saw-sedge
<i>Galium</i> sp	Bedstraw
<i>Gompholobium huegelii</i>	Karalla or Common Wedge-pea
<i>Gonocarpus tetragynus</i>	Common Raspwort
<i>Goodenia blackiana</i>	Native Primrose
<i>Grevillea alpina</i>	Downy Grevillea
<i>Grevillea obtecta</i>	Fryerstown
<i>Hypericum gramineum</i>	Small St John's Wort
<i>Lepidosperma laterale</i>	Variable Sword-sedge
<i>Leptorhynchos tenuifolius</i>	Wiry Buttons
<i>Leucopogon virgatus</i>	Common Beard-heath
<i>Lomandra filiformis</i> var <i>filiformis</i>	Wattle Mat-rush
<i>Lomandra multiflora</i>	Many-flowered Mat-rush - <i>these last two were the best flowering that I have ever seen.</i>
<i>Microseris</i> sp 3	Yam Daisy
<i>Opercularia varia</i>	Variable Stinkweed (not on John's list)
<i>Ozothamnus obcordatus</i>	Grey Everlasting
<i>Platylobium montanum</i> ssp <i>prostratum</i>	Prostrate Flat-pea
<i>Podolobium procumbens</i>	Trailing Podolobium <i>A most attractive pea plant, and well represented in the reserve.</i>
<i>Poranthera microphylla</i>	Small Poranthera
<i>Pterostylis melagramma</i>	Tall Greenhood
<i>Pultenaea pedunculata</i>	Matted Bush-pea
<i>Rytidosperma pallidum</i>	Red-anther Wallaby Grass
<i>Senecio</i> sp	Fireweed
<i>Stellaria pungens</i>	Prickly Star-wort
<i>Stylidium ameria</i>	Grass Trigger-plant
<i>Thysanotus tuberosus</i>	Common Fringe-lily

Viola hederacea
Wahlenbergia stricta ssp *stricta*

Ivy-leaf Violet
Tall Bluebell

Mosses

Breutelia affinis
Dicranoloma billardieri
Sematophyllum homomallum

Fungi

Laetiporus portentosus White Punk

Ferns

Asplenium flabelifolium Necklace Fern

*Richard Piesse sent in a similar list which added the following to Rita's -

<i>Epacris impressa</i>	Common Heath
<i>Lomandra longifolia</i>	Spiny-headed
<i>Luzula meridionalis</i>	Common Wood-rush
<i>Pimelea linifolia</i>	Slender Rice-flower
<i>Poa labillardierei</i>	Common Tussock-grass
<i>Poa sieberiana</i>	Grey Tussock-grass
<i>Themeda triandra</i>	Kangaroo grass
<i>Wahlenbergia gracilentia</i>	Annual Bluebell

A (casual) bird list by Noel Young: Olive-backed Oriole, White-throated Tree-creeper, Spotted Pardalote, White-winged Chough, Wattlebird, Rufous Whistler, Crimson Rosella, Kookaburra and Magpie.

Wattle Expedition

Elvyne Hogan

In early September, while staying at Wangarabell in East Gippsland (on the Genoa River 50km inland from Mallacoota), I had the opportunity to accompany Al Gibb on an expedition to find *Acacia subporosa* in flower. Al is photographing every wattle in Victoria for a forthcoming book on wattles, to be called *A Field Guide to the Acacias of Victoria*. Arthur Court, who designed and wrote the Acacia section in Willis' *A Handbook to Plants in Victoria*, was writing the text but sadly died before it was finished. Daniel Murphy from the Melbourne Herbarium has taken over. The Field Guide will be published sometime in the next three years.

Acacia subporosa, (Bower Wattle) is restricted to the eastern tip of Victoria, where it is only known from the Howe Range, and a near-coastal strip up to Bega, NSW (Flora of Victoria V3). On the way from Wangarabell to the site of the wattle (a distance of about 65km) we noted each wattle we saw on the way. We counted 21 wattles as follows: *Acacia dealbata*, Silver Wattle; *Ac. decurrens*, Early Black Wattle; *Ac. brownii*, Heath Wattle; *Ac. cognata*, Narrow-leaf Bower-wattle; *Ac. falciformis*, Large-leaf Hickory Wattle; *Ac. floribunda*, White Sallow Wattle; *Ac. genistifolia*, Spreading Wattle; *Ac. implexa*, Lightwood; *Ac. longifolia*, Sallow Wattle; *Ac. mearnsii*, Black Wattle; *Ac. melanoxylon*, Blackwood; *Ac. mucronata*, Narrow-leaf Wattle; *Ac. myrtifolia*, Myrtle Wattle; *Ac. obtusifolia*, Wattle; *Ac. oxycedrus*, Spike Wattle; *Ac. pycnantha*, Golden Wattle; *Ac. stricta*, Hop Wattle; *Ac. suaveolens*, Sweet Wattle; *Ac. terminalis*, Sunshine Wattle; *Ac. ulicifolia*, Juniper Wattle; *Ac. verticillata*, Prickly Moses. This seemed quite a large number of wattles over a relatively small distance.

Another wattle only occurring along the Genoa River and one other site south of Mt Deddick) is *Ac. lanigera* ssp. *gracilipes*, Woolly Wattle another variety of our local *Ac. lanigera* var. *whanii*. It would make beautiful garden shrub.

Pudding Bag Gallery

Noel Young



Fringe lily *Thysanotus tuberosus*



Wedge-pea *Gompholobium huegelii*



Heath Milkwort *Comesperma ericinum*



Chocolate lily *Arthropodium strictum*



Satin Green Forester moth



Unusually pale blue flowers of *Dianella admixta*



This appears to be an intriguing colour variation in adjacent patches of Trailing Shaggy-pea *Podolobium procumbens*.



Prickly Star-wort *Stellaria pungens* and Small St John's Wort *Hypericum gramineum*

The elusive water-rat (*Hydromys chrysogaster*)

Lynne Kelly

Everyone, it seemed, saw water-rats except me. Damian and I met through the mammal survey group of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria. Time after time, water-rats were recorded on surveys by anyone — everyone — except me. Throughout our marriage, Damian has taken great delight in describing the many times he has seen water-rats. At the same locations, I just stared at empty river banks and still water. The years of failure gradually turned into decades. I began to believe I would die without ever seeing one.

It's not as if they are tiny little critters. Water-rats grow to a body size, without tail, of up to 40 cm. The tip of the long tail is usually tipped white, a distinctive feature. They feed mostly on crustaceans, aquatic insects and fish but have also been observed eating birds, mammals, frogs, reptiles, mussels, spiders and even plants. Found in Australia, New Guinea and a number of adjacent islands, they are not uncommon except when I am present. This species is widely distributed in eastern Australia, typically seen foraging in shallow water then sitting out on a fallen log or tree root to devour their catch.

Damian was painfully enthusiastic about the photos he took of a water-rat he 'watched for ages' at the Loddon River near Newstead. They are well known from the caravan park at Baringhup and many other sites around the region, but were never active when I scoured the waterways. And Damian had seen them in the river at Avoca. He told me so. Often.

Last year, we went birding at Avoca. Damian called me to the river bank. I got there in time to glimpse the rear end of a large rat with a long, white-tipped tail disappear into a burrow in the bank. And there it stayed. But I'd seen my first water-rat and rejoiced heartily. On the 19th of November 2014, I had a long luscious look at a water-rat swimming and feeding at Lake Wendouree in Ballarat. And I got a better photograph than any of Damian's.



A little bit twitchy

Chris Timewell

On Sunday 17th November 2014, Lisa and I formed an unofficial twitchathon team of two. The aim was to see as many bird species as possible within an 8 hour time-frame (We didn't have the stamina for the 24 hour race). The main rules of the competition were that (a) the team had to have at least two participants, (b) more than 50% of the team members needed to identify each bird species by sight or sound for it to be ticked, (c) we had to remain within Victoria, and (d) the birds must be wild and free-living. Trips to the zoo or local pet shop were forbidden.

Our intended start time of 8am was delayed for an hour due to the horrible stormy weather. First point of call was the rocky reef at Rickett's Point, Beaumaris. The tide was in, the waves were choppy and the car parking was \$5 per hour. In a rapid-fire count, we managed to get started with 22 species, the highlight being a lone Sooty Oystercatcher huddled amongst a group of Crested Tern.

Noisy Miner, Common Starling, Indian Myna, Spotted Dove, Silvereye, Little Wattlebird, Red Wattlebird, White-browed Scrub-wren, Silver Gull, Pacific Gull, Crested Tern, Black Swan, Australian Pelican, Sooty Oystercatcher, Grey Teal, Pied Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, Australian Magpie, Little Raven, Common Blackbird, Superb Fairy-wren, Brown Thornbill (species 1 to 22)

We picked up a few urban bird species on the drive to the wetland end of Braeside Park. This was a return to my old stomping grounds, as I was a regular visitor there while learning to identify birds in the mid-late 1990s. Woodland birds were few a far between, with the Noisy Miner and Indian Myna dominating. The wetland birds were more impressive – with the bird-hide overlooking a mixed nesting colony of cormorants, Darters and ibis. The Freckled Duck and Blue-billed Ducks were also nice surprises. We were confined to the bird hide for 30 minutes longer than expected as wave-after-wave of storms blew through.

Welcome Swallow, Grey Butcherbird, Rainbow Lorikeet, Swamp Harrier, Whistling Kite, Dusky Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Purple Swamphen, Blue-billed Duck, Red-browed Finch, Darter, Little Black Cormorant, Great Cormorant, Pacific Black Duck, Hoary-headed Grebe, Freckled Duck, Red-rumped Parrot, Eastern Rosella, Australian White Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Magpie-lark, Great Egret, Chestnut Teal, Australian Reed-Warbler, Royal Spoonbill, European Goldfinch (species 23 to 48)

The heathy woodlands at the other end of Braeside Park were initially quite disappointing. Again Noisy Miners were displacing most other species. We had two special sightings though; an adult Tawny Frogmouth and two fluffy half-sized chicks sitting quietly on a branch, and also a small group of Cattle Egrets feeding in a nearby paddock. In the democratic tradition of twitchathons – all birds are created equal. Thus, these two bird species that we rarely see were worth the same as the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Masked Lapwing that we saw along the roadside on the drive to our next location – the Dandenong Ranges.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Spotted Pardalote, Tawny Frogmouth, Cattle Egret, Masked Lapwing (species 49 to 53)

It was a frustrating slow and busy drive to our next site, with half of Melbourne's population seeming driving to or from one of the dozens of Bunnings Warehouses.

A hasty stroll through the Ferntree Gully Walk introduced us to an obliging Superb Lyrebird scratching away for bugs, as well as an attractive Rufous Fantail moving through gully vegetation. Even though we didn't pick up the large number of new species we had hoped, the lush forest and the huge Mountain Ash trees were more pleasant on all of our senses than the stereotypical twitchathon trip to a sewerage farm.

Superb Lyrebird, Crimson Rosella, Galah, Eastern Whipbird, Grey Fantail, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Striated Pardalote, Laughing Kookaburra, Rufous Fantail (species 54 to 62)

We then made a tactical error. The next 3 hours were spent driving. We reached the Metcalfe Nature Conservation Reserve alongside Goldfields Rd with barely one hour left on the clock. This hidden gem didn't disappoint, with many drier-country woodland birds to add to our list. A Dusky Woodswallow feeding two chicks in the nest, both very close to fledging, was the highlight – with the Crested Shrike-tit a close second.

Dusky Woodswallow, Crested Shrike-tit, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Fuscous Honeyeater, White-winged Chough, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Grey Currawong, Long-billed Corella, Willie Wagtail, Grey Shrike-thrush, Brown Falcon, White-necked Heron, Olive-backed Oriole, White-throated Treecreeper, Sacred Kingfisher (species 63 to 77)

We pulled into Castlemaine with barely 15 minutes left on the clock. The profusely flowering gums near the start of Greenhill Ave quickly gave us our Musk Lorikeet tick, and the elusive House Sparrow finally revealed itself on the road to Botanic Gardens. Once at the Gardens, we were shocked to find Hardheads absent on this day. They are always there – but not today! To the amusement of other park users, we literally ran northwards with binoculars firmly in our grasp, and ready for action. With a mere 70 seconds left on the clock we nabbed our 82nd and final bird species – the Common Bronzewing. Overall, it was a lot of fun, and good training for the Annual Bird count day with the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club on the first weekend in December.

Rock Dove, Musk Lorikeet, House Sparrow, Australian Wood Duck, Common Bronzewing (species 78 to 82)

In late October I came across a huge mass of "communal spider" web completely covering a number of large gorse bushes on the Goldfields track near Chewton. It was very dense and covered a large area.

One reference says it may represent a juvenile stage when large numbers form a colony, which may include other predators and scavengers.

- Noel Young



AGM notice

After our December break-up the next meeting will be our AGM on February 13, 2015. Please give some thought to helping out on the committee next year, and let our Secretary or President know for nomination before that date. Meantime, have a great Xmas season.

Noel Young - editor

Observations

At the November meeting -

- ◆ Rita contrasted Taradale flowering with the Castlemaine area; In the latter case many Chocolate lilies have died off before flowering this year, but are flowering in numbers around Taradale, along with many examples of the Red Parrot-pea *Dillwynia hispida* along the channel
- ◆ Chris Timewell witnessed a Pallid Cuckoo and an Oriole eating Cup Moth larvae in the Muckleford Forest. Apparently, cuckoos are notably absent in many areas of Victoria this spring, but seem to be plentiful here
- ◆ In the area of Wewak track - Loop track during recent surveys, one quadrat yielded large Duck Orchids, and Western Bronze-hood Caladenias in great numbers - Richard Piesse
- ◆ Sivereyes seen lately around the house - Geraldine
- ◆ Penny Garnett reported a Kingfisher in the creek near Burnett rd.
- ◆ White-browed Babblers often around the place have several nests, but are currently very active in one. Not sure if they are nesting or just roosting in it - Geoff Harris
- ◆ Rita has noticed that Cup Moth larvae in her area are dying off and speculated that the cause may be a disease; a common occurrence following rapid reproduction to large numbers
- ◆ Nigel recounted his non-observation of a rare bird (Dowitcher) near Kerang
- ◆ **Later**
- ◆ The following week Nigel returned to Kerang and succeeded in "chalking up" the long-billed Dowitcher. He has a photo to prove it
- ◆ Geraldine noticed a Shingleback on the lawn nipping off Cape-weed flowers
- ◆ On a walk around the Botanical Gardens on November 23, I found a solitary Nankeen Night Heron on the island in Lake Joanna, nervously eyeing off passers-by and sporting a long white breeding plume [cover photo] - Noel Young

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists

Coming events

Sat December 6 Annual Bird Count

Fri December 12 meeting: Members night

Member's "show and tell" - share a few photos, a nature experience, a poem - be as creative as you like. And bring a plate to share for supper.

2015

Fri February 13 meeting: AGM speaker Geoff Park

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Subscriptions for 2014

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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